

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9551

INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

AMCONSUL NICE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 13270

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, FR

SUBJECT: SENATE PRESIDENT POHER'S VIEWS ON THE NEW
GOVERNMENT AND FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

1. AT A PRIVATE LUNCHON WEDNESDAY MAY 29, SENATE
PRESIDENT POHER GAVE ME HIS VIEWS ON THE NEW GOVERN-
MENT AND US-FRENCH RELATIONS. PLEASE PROTECT.

2. PRESIDENT POHER SAID HE HAD NUMEROUS OCCASIONS TO
TALK WITH GISCARD DURING THE CAMPAIGN AND HE IS CON-
VINCED GISCARD UNDERSTANDS THE NECESSITY OF BROADENING
HIS BASE OF SUPPORT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. HE BELIEVES
GISCARD WILL ANNOUNCE SOME SPECTACULAR SOCIAL MEASURES,
AIMED PARTICULARLY AT YOUTH, IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS; FOR
EXAMPLE, ACCORDING TO POHER, HE WILL INTRODUCE BILLS
TO REDUCE THE VOTING AGE TO 18 AND SHORTEN OBLIGATORY
MILITARY SERVICE FROM A YEAR TO SIX MONTHS.

3. POHER ADDED THAT HE IS NOT SURE GISCARD WILL BE
ABLE TO SHAKE LOOSE FROM A TRADITIONAL CONSERVATIVE
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OUTLOOK ON ECONOMIC MATTERS WHICH RESULTS FROM HIS

EDUCATION AND FROM HAVING SPENT MOST OF HIS ADULT LIFE IN THE ECONOMIC/FINANCE BUREAUCRACY. POHER ADDED THAT GISCARD'S SUPPORTERS IN INDUSTRY AND MANAGEMENT TOO OFTEN HAVE AN INBRED "RULER-SUBJECT" ATTITUDE TOWARDS LABOR. ONLY IF GISCARD CAN CHANGE THESE ATTITUDES AND CHANGE THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF FRANCE WILL HE BE ABLE TO MAKE IN-ROADS INTO THE NON-COMMUNIST LEFT, IN POHER'S VIEW.

4. AS FOR THE COMPOSITION OF THE GOVERNMENT, POHER SAID GISCARD WAS CLEARLY TRYING TO INCLUDE ALL CENTER ELEMENTS THAT HAD NOT SIGNED THE COMMON PROGRAM OF THE LEFT. THIS IS WHY HE BROUGHT IN JEAN-JACQUES SERVAN-SCHREIBER AND OFFERED A PORTFOLIO TO A SOCIALIST, MAX LEJEUNE, WHO HAD BOLTED THE SOCIALIST PARTY WHEN IT ENTERED INTO ALLIANCE WITH THE COMMUNISTS. (POHER CONFIRMED THAT TO HIS KNOWLEDGE LEJEUNE HAD BEEN OFFERED THE PORTFOLIO OF COOPERATION BUT HAD TURNED IT DOWN BECAUSE HIS ONLY REAL INTEREST IS NATIONAL DEFENSE.)

5. CONTRARY TO THE PREVAILING ASSUMPTION IN PARIS POLITICAL CIRCLES, POHER BELIEVES THAT GISCARD WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE HAD ONE OF THE GAULLIST BARONS IN THE GOVERNMENT. HE IS CONVINCED THAT THE PRESIDENT OFFERED PORTFOLIOS AT LEAST TO GUICHARD AND PERHAPS OTHER PROMINENT GAULLISTS, WHO REFUSED IN THE INTEREST OF UDR UNITY. HE SAID THE UDR BARONS RECOGNIZED THAT THEIR ONLY LEVERAGE FOR EXERTING INFLUENCE ON THE GOVERNMENT LIES IN THE 181-MAN CONTINGENT IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. HAD ONE OF THE BARONS ENTERED THE CHIRAC GOVERNMENT, IT WOULD HAVE HAD THE EFFECT OF SPLITTING THE UDR ASSEMBLY GROUP INTO TWO OR PERHAPS MORE FACTIONS. HE SAID THAT THE ONLY HARD LINE GAULLIST IN THE GOVERNMENT IS FORMER SENATOR JACQUES SOUFFLET, A CLOSE PERSONAL FRIEND OF BOTH MESSMER AND GALLEY. ACCORDING TO POHER, SOUFFLET AGREED TO ENTER THE GOVERNMENT (DEFENSE) BEFORE HE HAD SEEN THE LIST OF THE OTHER MINISTERS. POHER FOUND HIM IN A STATE OF SHOCK JUST AFTER HE HAD LEARNED THAT JEAN-JACQUES SERVAN-SCHREIBER WOULD BE AMONG HIS COLLEAGUES.

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SOUFFLET THOUGHT OF WITHDRAWING FROM THE GOVERNMENT IMMEDIATELY BUT FINALLY DECIDED TO STAY IN.

6. POHER SAID GISCARD AND CHIRAC WILL HAVE TO WALK A TIGHTROPE IN DEALING WITH THE UDR. THEY CLEARLY WANT TO BRING THE UDR UNDER CONTROL OR BREAK IT UP. POHER RECOUNTED A CONVERSATION HE HAD DURING THE CAMPAIGN WITH MICHEL PONIATOWSKI (THE NEW MINISTER

OF INTERIOR). PONIATOWSKI TOLD HIM "WE WANT THE UDR AS PART OF THE MAJORITY, BUT WE WANT THEM ON ONE KNEE;-- ON ONE KNEE, NOT TWO KNEES." POHER SAID PONIATOWSKI MEANT BY THIS THAT THE UDR COULD NOT BE PUSHED

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TO THE POINT WHERE IT WOULD VOTE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT AND THEREFORE FORCE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS AGAINST ITS OWN BEST INTERESTS. IF THIS WERE TO HAPPEN, THE UDR WOULD LOSE A NUMBER OF SEATS AND WOULD JOIN THE MAJORITY "ON BOTH KNEES", BUT SO REDUCED IN NUMBERS THAT A PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY IN THE ASSEMBLY WOULD BE JEAPORDIZED. POHER SAID HE BELIEVES THAT IN SPITE OF CLEAR DIFFICULTIES GISCARD WILL HAVE WITH THE UDR, THE UDR GROUP IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WILL IN FACT SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT ON ALL IMPORTANT MEASURES AND THAT GISCARD WILL HAVE A BREATHING SPELL OF AT LEAST A YEAR TO A YEAR-AND-A-HALF WITHOUT NEED TO FACE THE POSSIBILITY OF LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS.

7. ON FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS, POHER SAID THAT THE

US CLEARLY HAS A GOOD FRIEND IN THE ELYSEE IN GISCARD D'ESTAING. HE SAID IN DEALING WITH THE NEW REGIME THE US SHOULD BE PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO FRENCH, AND INDEED, TO EUROPEAN, SENSIBILITIES. HE ARGUED THAT THESE SENSIBILITIES MAY SEEM OUTDATED AND AT TIMES RIDICULOUS, BUT THAT THEY HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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FACT THAT THE EUROPEAN NATIONS WERE ONCE THE MOST POWERFUL IN THE WORLD. HE SAID THAT IF THE US TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE DEEP AND PERVASIVE URGE AMONG EUROPEAN LEADERS FOR POLITICAL UNITY AND A COMMON VOICE IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, THEN WE WOULD HAVE LITTLE DIFFICULTY WITH THE NEW FRENCH REGIME IN HAMMERING OUT THE DETAILS OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TIES WITH FRANCE AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY.

8. COMMENT: POHER HAS GAINED IN STATURE AS A RESULT OF HIS SECOND TOUR AS INTERIM PRESIDENT OF FRANCE. POLITICAL OBSERVERS AND THE PRESS AND MEDIA ARE UNANIMOUS IN THE VIEW THAT POHER CONDUCTED HIMSELF WITH DIGNITY FOLLOWING PRESIDENT POMPIDOU'S DEATH AND THAT HE PROVIDED FAIR, IMPARTIAL AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DURING THE CAMPAIGN. HE IS INTERESTED IN MAKING AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES THIS FALL IN HIS CAPACITY AS PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE. I AGREED TO ASSIST HIM IN ANY WAY THAT I COULD IN ARRANGING APPROPRIATE APPOINTMENTS FOR HIM IN WASHINGTON, NEW YORK AND ELSEWHERE. WE WILL SEND A SEPARATE MESSAGE ON A POSSIBLE PROGRAM FOR POHER WHEN HIS PLANS FOR THE VISIT ARE MORE FIRM.
IRWIN

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